

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Withdrawn) Apparatus for preventing the escape of natural, artificial, or therapeutic material through a defect in the annulus fibrosis of a spinal disc, comprising:

a device having a first physical extent facilitating introduction of the device relative to a defect in an annulus fibrosis, and

a second physical extent, different from the first, wherein the device functions to occlude the defect.

2. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein:

the device is composed of flexible or compressible material;

the first physical extent is achieved by compacting the device; and

the second physical extent is achieved through expansion of the device.

3. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the device includes a flexible screen or patch.

4. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, further including one or more anchors to hold the device in place relative to the defect.

5. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein:

the device is provided as a liquid or gel which solidifies to achieve the second physical extent.

6. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 5, including a hydrogel or elastomer.

7. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein:

the device is composed of material that naturally returns to a predetermined shape;

the first physical extent is achieved by straightening the device for introduction; and

the second physical extent is achieved as the device returns to the predetermined shape.

8. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, including a plurality of devices which function collectively to achieve the second physical extent.

9. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the devices are introduced separately.

10. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the device occludes the defect while allowing compression and distraction of the disc with respect to normal spinal movement.

11. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the device incorporates a radio-opaque contrast material.

12. (Currently Amended) A method of preventing ~~the escape of~~ natural, artificial, or therapeutic material in an intradiscal space from extruding through a defect in the annulus fibrosis having a cross-sectional area of a spinal disc, comprising the steps of:

inserting a device relative to a defect in the annulus fibrosis; and

~~occluding~~ covering the defect by:

a) allowing the device to expand to a ~~larger~~ size substantially larger than the cross-sectional area of the defect,

b) allowing the device to return to a memorized shape substantially larger than the cross-sectional area of the defect, or

c) ~~[[by]]~~ adding additional devices which physically cooperate following installation to create a shape substantially larger than the cross-sectional area of the defect.

13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, wherein:

the step of inserting the device includes compacting the device into a compressed form for introduction ~~relative to the defect~~.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, wherein the device ~~includes~~ is a flexible screen or patch.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, wherein the device ~~inserted into the defect~~ includes an anchor, the method further including the step of anchoring the device in place ~~relative to the defect~~ by engagement of the anchor with tissue proximate to the defect.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[13]]~~ 12, wherein the device includes a liquid or gel which solidifies following insertion of the device ~~into the defect~~.

17. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 16, wherein the device includes a hydrogel or elastomer.

18. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the device occludes the defect while allowing compression and distraction of the disc with respect to normal spinal movement.

19. (Previously Presented). The method of claim 14, wherein the flexible screen is a metal screen.

20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein the flexible screen comprises titanium.

21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15, wherein the anchor includes a wire.

22. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15, wherein the anchor includes a spike.

23. (New) The method of claim 12, further including the step of anchoring the device to an adjacent vertebral body.